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ABSTRACT

This lesson focuses on the black soldiers of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Students use primary source materials from the National Archives for classroom research. Students analyze featured documents, engage in creative writing, present oral reports and conduct further research on the topic of the black Civil War experience. The lesson is designed to be cross-curricular and help the classroom teacher with history, government, and language arts instruction. A brief essay for historical background is included along with numerous examples of archival material and suggestions for classroom use. (EH)

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ED 460 911

The Fight for Equal Rights:

Black Soldiers

in the

Civil War

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SO 029 481

Lesson Plan

National Archives and Records Administration

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The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

Era 5-Civil War and Reconstruction (1850 - 1877)

- **Standard 2A**-Demonstrate understanding of how the resources of the Union and the Confederacy affected the course of the war.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

- **Standard II.B.1**-Explain how a history of slavery distinguishes American society from other societies.
- **Standard II.D.3**-Evaluate, take, and defend positions on what the fundamental values and principles of American political life are and their importance to the maintenance of constitutional democracy.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share this exercise with your history, government, and language arts colleagues.

Historical Background

> *Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.*
>
> —Frederick Douglass

The issues of emancipation and military service were intertwined from the onset of the Civil War. News from Fort Sumter set off a rush by free black men to enlist in U.S. military units. They were turned away, however, because a Federal law dating from 1792 barred Negroes from bearing arms for the U.S. army (although they had served in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812). In Boston disappointed would-be volunteers met and passed a resolution requesting that the Government modify its laws to permit their enlistment.

The Lincoln administration wrestled with the idea of authorizing the recruitment of black troops, concerned that such a move would prompt the border states to secede. When Gen. John C. Frémont (photo citation: 111-B-3756) in Missouri and Gen. David Hunter (photo citation: 111-B-3580) in South Carolina issued proclamations that emancipated slaves in

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their military regions and permitted them to enlist, their superiors sternly revoked their orders. By mid-1862, however, the escalating number of former slaves (contrabands), the declining number of white volunteers, and the increasingly pressing personnel needs of the Union Army pushed the Government into reconsidering the ban.

As a result, on July 17, 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act, freeing slaves who had masters in the Confederate Army. Two days later, slavery was abolished in the territories of the United States, and on July 22 President Lincoln (photo citation: 111-B-2323) presented the preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet. After the Union Army turned back Lee's first invasion of the North at Antietam, MD, and the Emancipation Proclamation was subsequently announced, black recruitment was pursued in earnest. Volunteers from South Carolina, Tennessee, and Massachusetts filled the first authorized black regiments. Recruitment was slow until black leaders such as Frederick Douglass (photo citation: 200-FL-22) encouraged black men to become soldiers to ensure eventual full citizenship. (Two of Douglass's own sons contributed to the war effort.) Volunteers began to respond, and in May 1863 the Government established the Bureau of Colored Troops to manage the burgeoning numbers of black soldiers.

By the end of the Civil War, roughly 179,000 black men (10% of the Union Army) served as soldiers in the U.S. Army and another 19,000 served in the Navy. Nearly 40,000 black soldiers died over the course of the war—30,000 of infection or disease. Black soldiers served in artillery and infantry and performed all noncombat support functions that sustain an army, as well. Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters also contributed to the war cause. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers. Black women, who could not formally join the Army, nonetheless served as nurses, spies, and scouts, the most famous being Harriet Tubman (photo citation: 200-HN-PIO-1), who scouted for the 2d South Carolina Volunteers.

Because of prejudice against them, black units were not used in combat as extensively as they might have been. Nevertheless, the soldiers served with distinction in a number of battles. Black infantrymen fought gallantly at Milliken's Bend, LA; Port Hudson, LA; Petersburg, VA; and Nashville, TN. The July 1863 assault on Fort Wagner, SC, in which the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers lost two-thirds of their officers and half of their troops, was memorably dramatized in the film *Glory*. By war's end, 16 black soldiers had been awarded the Medal of Honor for their valor.

In addition to the perils of war faced by all Civil War soldiers, black soldiers faced additional problems stemming from racial prejudice. Racial discrimination was prevalent even in the North, and discriminatory practices permeated the U.S. military. Segregated units were formed with black enlisted men and typically commanded by white officers and black noncommissioned officers. The 54th Massachusetts was commanded by Robert Shaw and the 1st South Carolina by Thomas Wentworth Higginson—both white. Black soldiers were initially paid $10 per month from which $3 was automatically deducted for clothing, resulting in a net pay of $7. In contrast, white soldiers received $13 per month from which no clothing allowance was drawn. In June 1864 Congress granted equal pay to the U.S. Colored Troops and made the action retroactive. Black soldiers received the same rations and supplies. In addition, they received comparable medical care.

The black troops, however, faced greater peril than white troops when captured by the Confederate Army. In 1863 the Confederate Congress threatened to punish severely officers of black troops and to enslave black soldiers. As a result, President Lincoln issued General Order 233, threatening reprisal on Confederate prisoners of war (POWs) for any mistreatment of black troops. Although the threat generally restrained the Confederates, black captives were typically treated more harshly than white captives. In perhaps the most heinous known example of abuse, Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest shot to death black Union soldiers captured at the Fort Pillow, TN, engagement of 1864.

The document featured with this article is a recruiting poster directed at black men during the Civil War. It refers to efforts by the Lincoln administration to provide equal pay for black soldiers and equal protection for black POWs. The original poster is located in the Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's–1917, Record Group 94.

Teaching Activities

Analyzing the Document

1. Make a copy of the featured document for students, and direct them to read the poster and answer the following questions:

a. Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?
b. What does the Government hope the audience will do?
c. What references to pay do you find in this document?
d. What references to treatment of prisoners of war do you find in this document?
e. What evidence of discrimination during the Civil War do you find in this document?
f. What evidence of Government efforts to improve conditions for black soldiers do you find in this document?
g. What purpose(s) of the Government is/are served by this poster?
h. How is the design of this poster different from contemporary military recruitment posters?

After the students have completed the assignment, review it and answer any questions they might raise. Then discuss more generally the contribution and status of black soldiers in the Civil War. Ask students to read the additional documents provided with this article to encourage further discussion.

Creative Writing Activities

2. Share with students the information in the introductory note; then assign them to draw on information from the note and the document to write one of the following:

- a journal entry of a member of the U.S. Colored Troops
- a letter from a U.S. Colored Troops soldier to a son who wants to enlist
- an account of the role of black soldiers for either an abolitionist or Confederate newspaper
- an interior monologue of the wife of a soldier in the U.S. Colored Troops reflecting on the circumstances of her family during his absence.

Oral Reports

3. President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981, issued in 1948, marked the transition of the black military experience from a period of segregated troops to one of integrated forces. The order provided for "equal treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services" and commanded the desegregation of the military "as rapidly as possible."
Divide the class into six groups: Civil War, Indian wars, World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and Persian Gulf War. Assign each group the task of locating information about black troops engaged in these conflicts and presenting the information they discover in an oral report. Encourage imaginative presentations. Students should collect information about pay, equipment, service assignments, promotion potential, treatment of black prisoners of war, and the relation of combat service to the struggle for equal rights in each instance. Each group should attempt to locate statistical information about the numbers of black soldiers in arms for their assigned conflict and the numbers of black casualties, decorations, and commissioned officers. Outstanding individual or unit contributions in engagements should be described as well.

For Further Research

4. Select one of the following activities as a followup:

a. Arrange with the school or public library to set up a reserved reading shelf for your students on the topic of the black Civil War experience.

b. Assign students to read a copy of Robert Lowell's poem "Colonel Shaw and the Massachusetts' 54th," alternately titled, "For the Union Dead." (The poem can be located in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*.) Ask students to consider the following questions:

- Why does Lowell say "their monument sticks like a fishbone in the city's throat"?
- Why do you think Shaw's father wanted no monument "except the ditch, where his son's body was thrown"?
- What is Lowell's attitude toward the "stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier"?
- Lowell altered the inscription on the Shaw Memorial that reads "Omnia Reliquit Servare Rem Publicam" ("He leaves all behind to serve the Republic") to his epigraph "Relinquunt Omnia Servare Rem Publicam" ("They give up everything to serve the Republic"). How is the inscription typical of attitudes in 1897, when the memorial was dedicated? How is the epigraph, written in 1960, different, and what does that say about Lowell's attitude toward these soldiers?

  The Web site of the National Gallery of Art provides valuable information about the Shaw memorial.

c. Ask for volunteers to watch the film *Glory*, a fictional account of the 54th Massachusetts, then the American Experience documentary, *The 54th Colored Infantry*. (If that tape is not available, you might use the segments on black units in Ken Burns's series *Civil War*.) Students should then review *Glory* for historical accuracy.

For More Information

Many of the documents included in this project were selected by the project manager of the National Archives and Records Administration's Civil War Conservation Corps (CWCC). You can read more about this volunteer project in an article that originally appeared in the summer 1997 issue of *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration*.

The photographs included in this project are available through the National Archives Information Locator (NAIL) database. NAIL is a searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA holdings across the country. You can use NAIL to search record descriptions by keywords or topics and retrieve digital copies of selected textual documents, photographs, maps, and sound recordings related to the Civil War and thousands of other topics.

TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM,

Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States proclaimed FREEDOM to over THREE MILLIONS OF SLAVES. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.

"WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, July 31.

"*General Order, No.* 233.

"The following order of the President is published for the information and government of all concerned:—

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 30.

"'It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its officers, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations, and the usages and customs of war, as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person on account of his color, is a relapse into barbarism, and a crime against the civilization of the age.

"'The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is, therefore, ordered, for every soldier of the United States, killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy, or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to prisoners of war.

"'ABRAHAM LINCOLN.'"

"'By order of the Secretary of War.

"'E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General.'"

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

"WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON CITY, August 8, 1863.

"Sir: Your letter of the 3d inst., calling the attention of this Department to the cases of Orin H. Brown, William H. Johnston, and Wm. Wilson, three colored men captured on the gunboat Isaac Smith, has received consideration. This Department has directed that three rebel prisoners of South Carolina, if there be any such in our possession, and if not, three others, be confined in close custody and held as hostages for Brown, Johnston and Wilson, and that the fact be communicated to the rebel authorities at Richmond.

"Very respectfully your obedient servant,

"EDWIN M. STANTON, *Secretary of War.*

"The Hon. GIDEON WELLES, *Secretary of the Navy.*"

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

Written with reference to the Convention held at Poughkeepsie, July 15th and 16th, 1863, to promote Colored Enlistments.

BOSTON, July 13th, 1863.

"I doubt if, in times past, our country could have expected from colored men any patriotic service. Such service is the return for protection. But now that protection has begun, the service should begin also. War should relative rights and duties be weighed with nicety. It is enough that our country, aroused at last to a sense of justice, seeks to enrol colored men among its defenders.

"If my counsels should reach such persons, I would say: enlist at once. Now is the *day* and now is the hour. Help to overcome your cruel enemies now battling against your country, and in this way you will surely overcome those other enemies hardly less cruel, here at home, who will still seek to degrade you. This is not the time to hesitate or to higgle. Do your duty to our country, and you will set an example of generous self-sacrifice which will conquer prejudice and open all hearts.

"Very faithfully yours,

"CHARLES SUMNER."

Recruiting Poster

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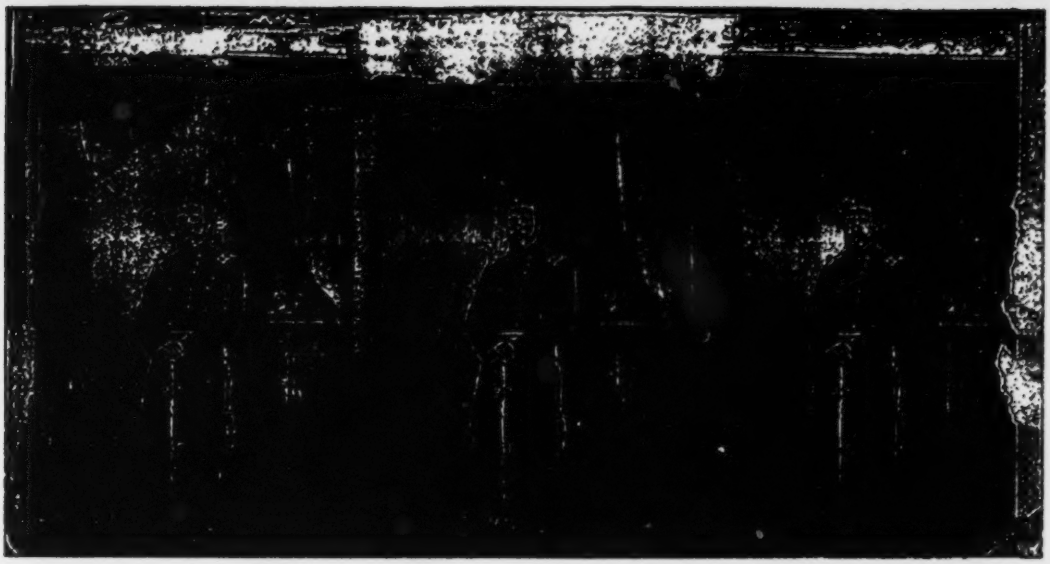
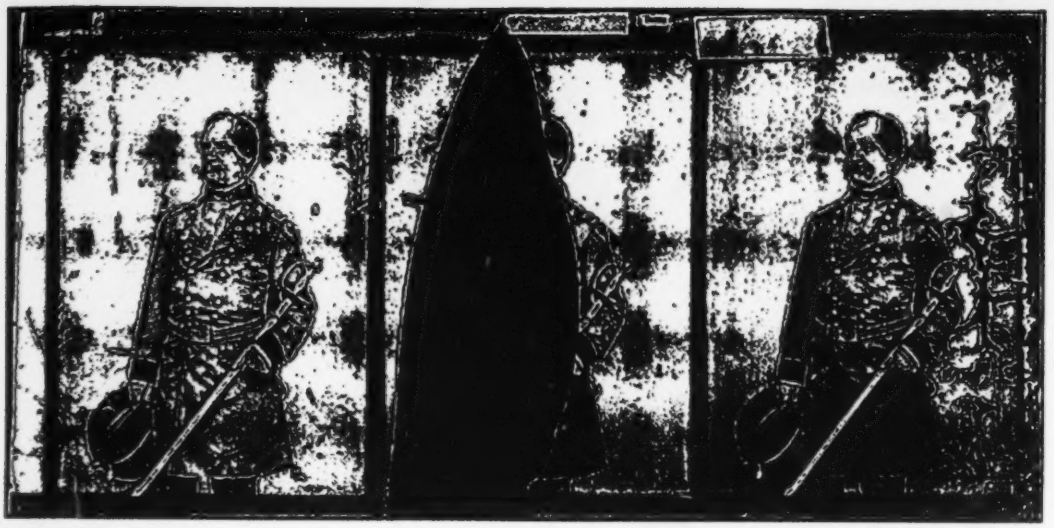


General John C. Fremont



General David Hunter

President Abraham Lincoln

Featured Document

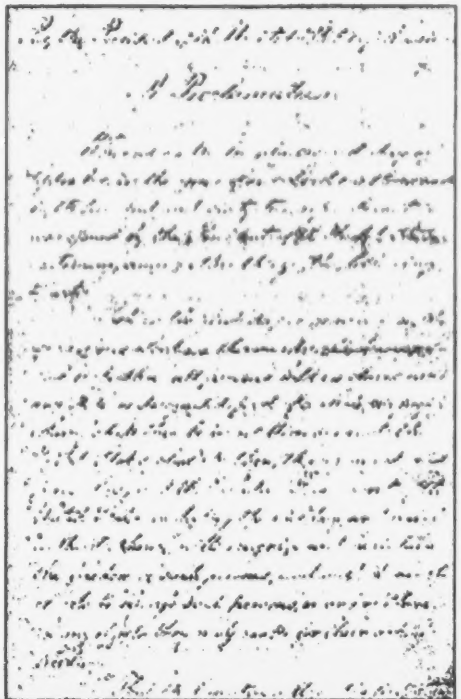
The Emancipation Proclamation

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

Despite this expansive wording, the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in many ways. It applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy that had already come under Northern control. Most important, the freedom it promised depended upon Union military victory.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not immediately free a single slave, it fundamentally transformed the character of the war. After January 1, 1863, every advance of federal troops expanded the domain of freedom. Moreover, the Proclamation announced the acceptance of black men into the Union Army and Navy, enabling the liberated to become liberators. By the end of the war, almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors had fought for the Union and freedom.

From the first days of the Civil War, slaves had acted to secure their own liberty. The Emancipation Proclamation confirmed their insistence that the war for the Union must become a war for freedom. It added moral force to the Union cause and strengthened the Union both militarily and politically. As a milestone along the road to slavery's final destruction, the Emancipation Proclamation had assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom.



Page 1 of the Emancipation Proclamation

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The original of the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, is in the National Archives in Washington, DC. It is written on two large sheets of paper, folded to make four leaves, or eight pages. The last three pages are blank. The document was originally tied with narrow red and blue ribbons, which were attached to the signature page by a wafered impression of the seal of the United States. Most of the ribbon remains; parts of the seal are still decipherable, but other parts have worn off.

The document was bound with other proclamations in a large volume preserved for many years by the Department of State. When it was prepared for binding, it was reinforced with strips along the center folds and then mounted on a still larger sheet of heavy paper. Written in red ink on the upper right-hand corner of this large sheet is the number of the Proclamation, 95, given to it by the Department of State long after it was signed. With other records, the volume containing the Emancipation Proclamation was transferred in 1936 from the Department of State to the National Archives of the United States.

The Emancipation Proclamation

January 1, 1863

A Transcription

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

> "That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.
>
> "That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation,

designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth[]], and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

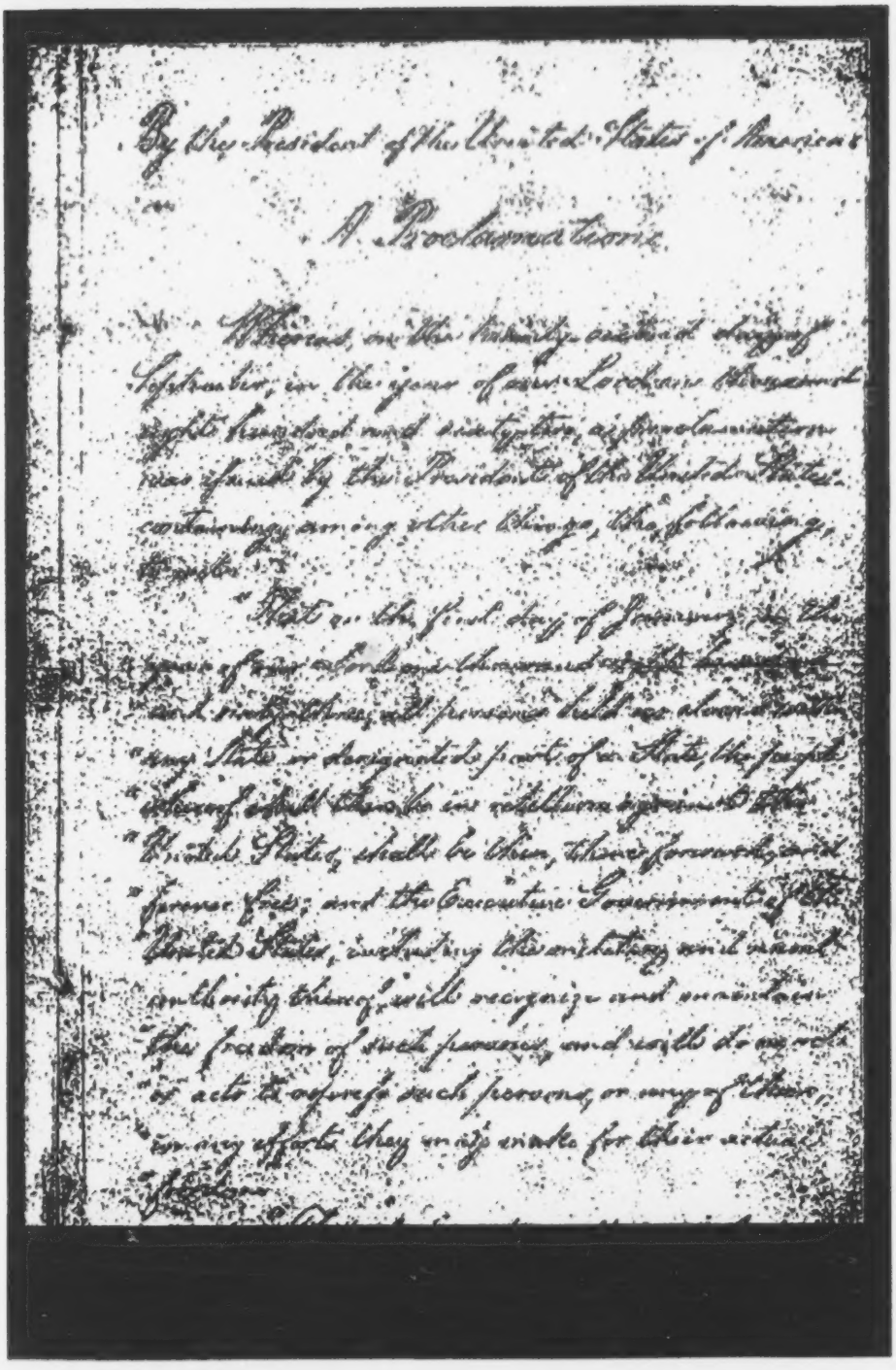
And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of
January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight
hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the
United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.



By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

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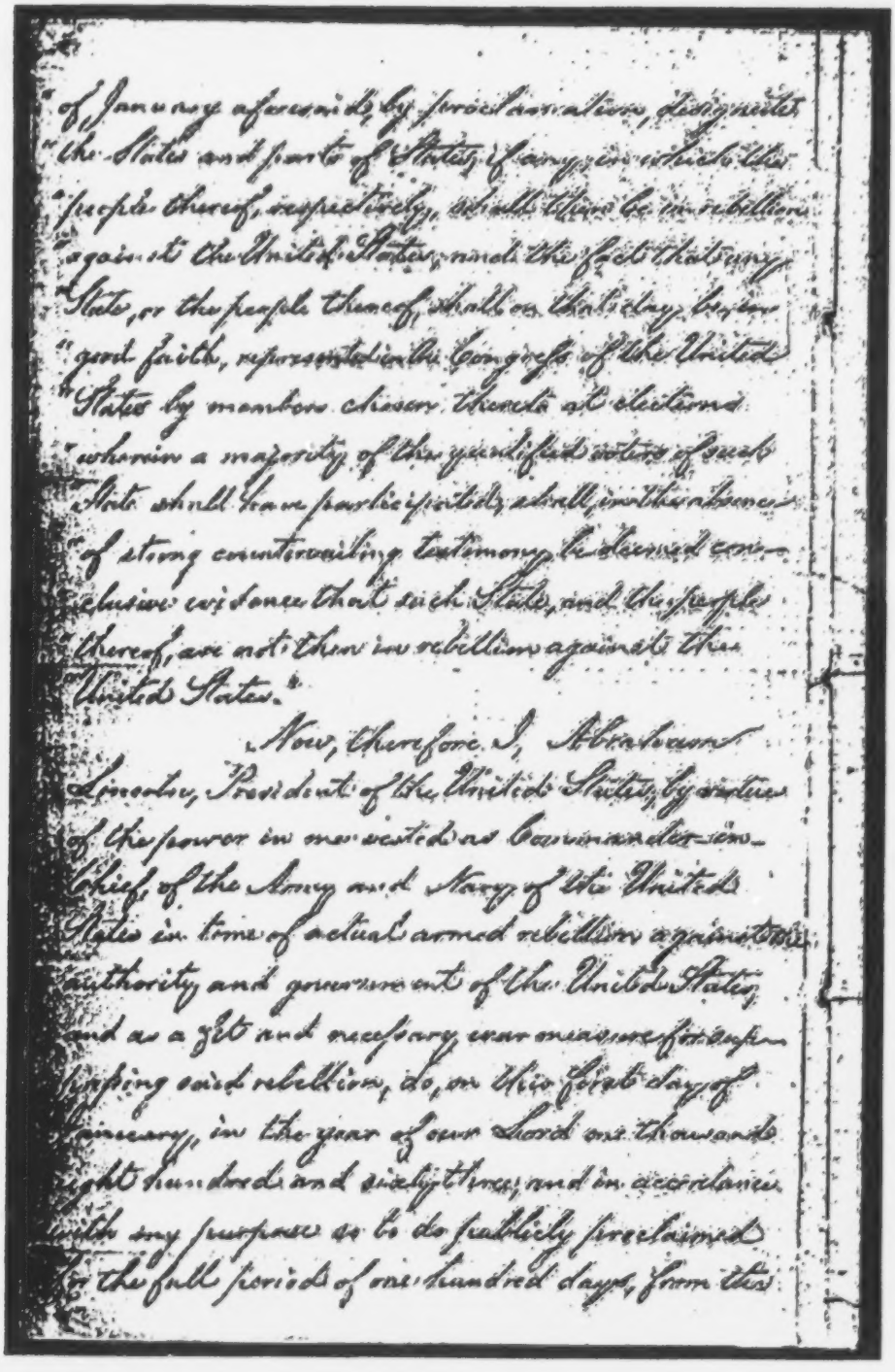

of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States, and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States.

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the

Emancipation Proclamation - Page 2

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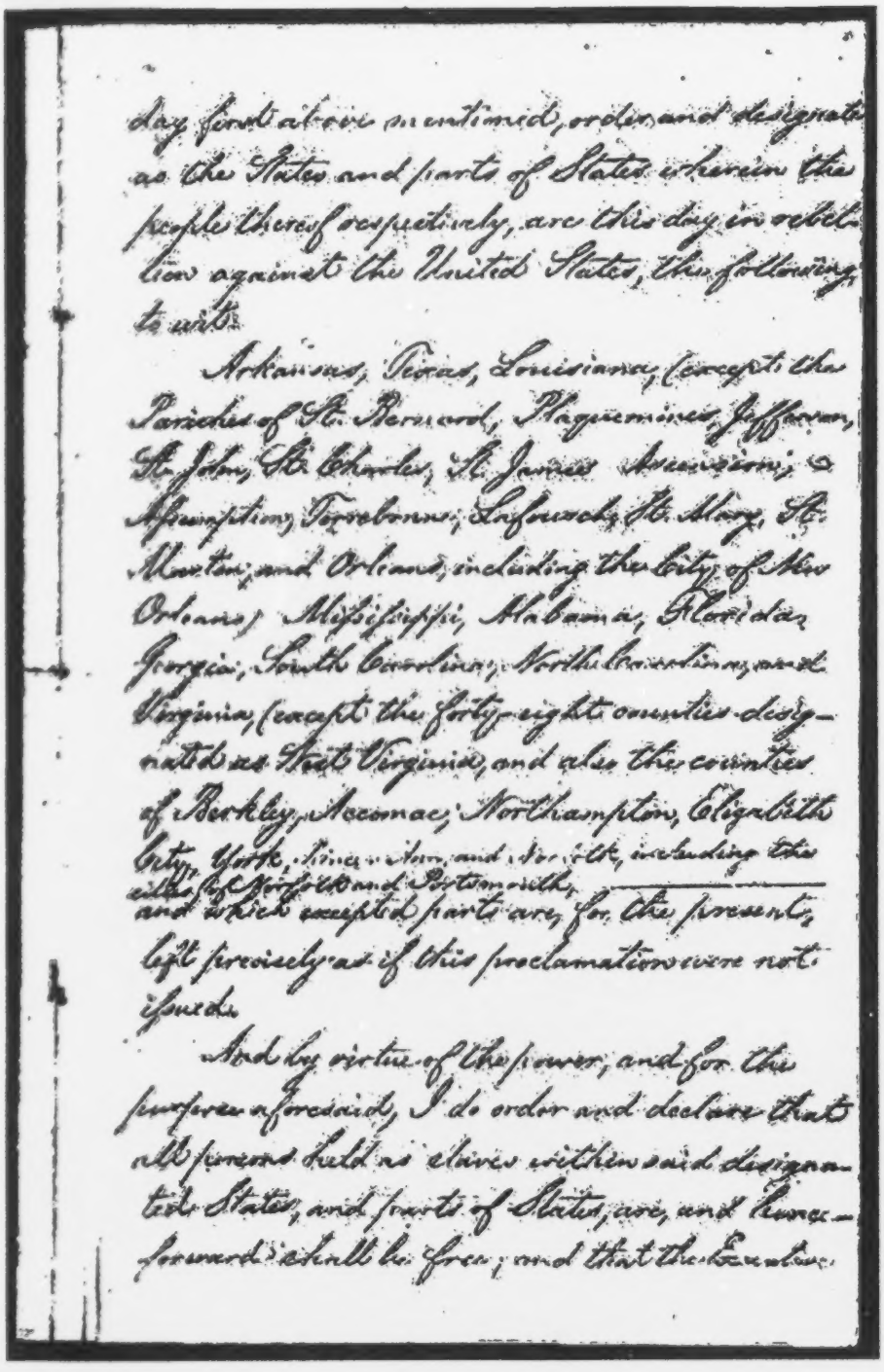

day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Anne, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth), and which excepted parts are, for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive

Emancipation Proclamation - Page 3

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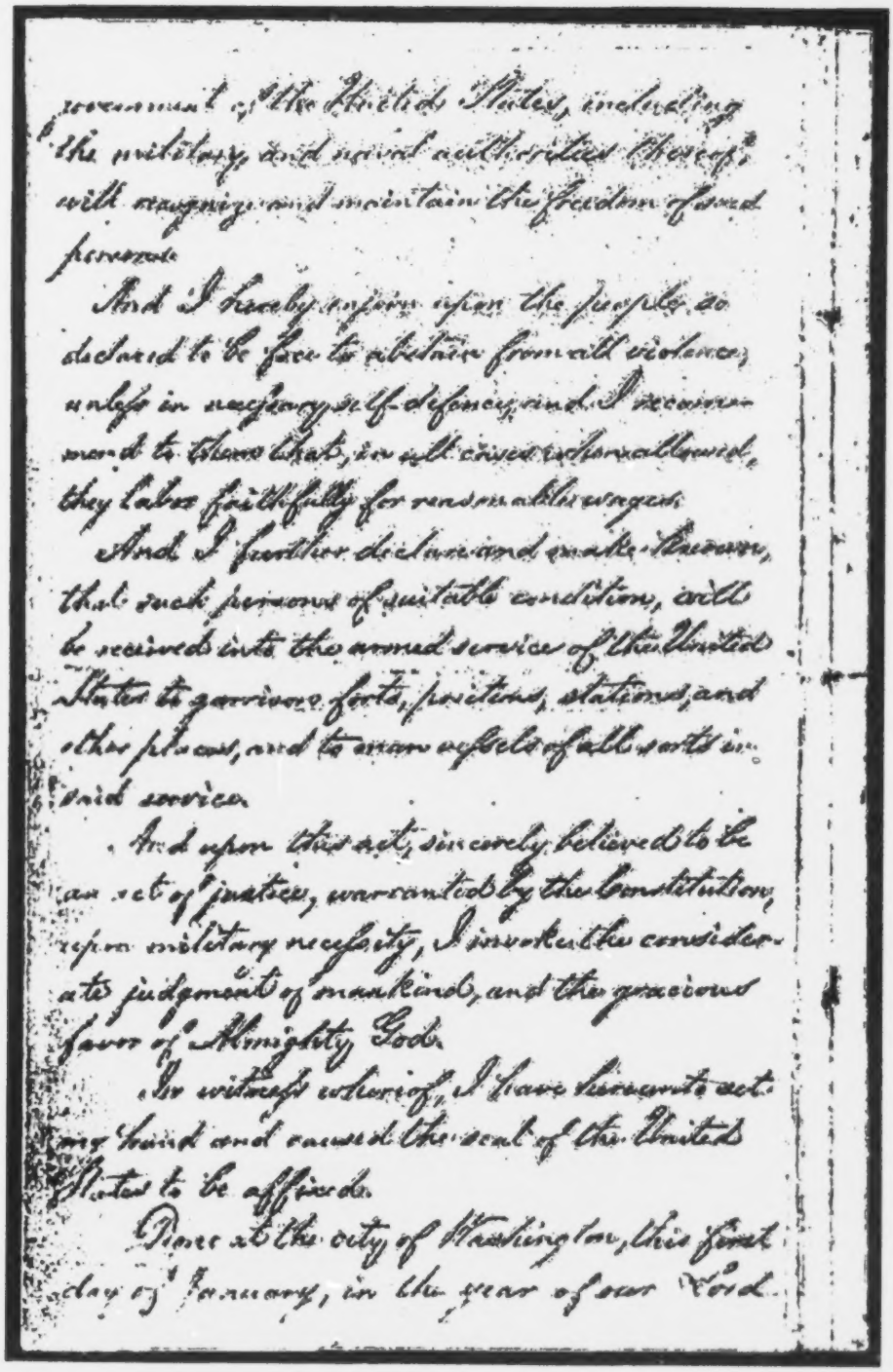

government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will maintain and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord

Emancipation Proclamation - Page 4

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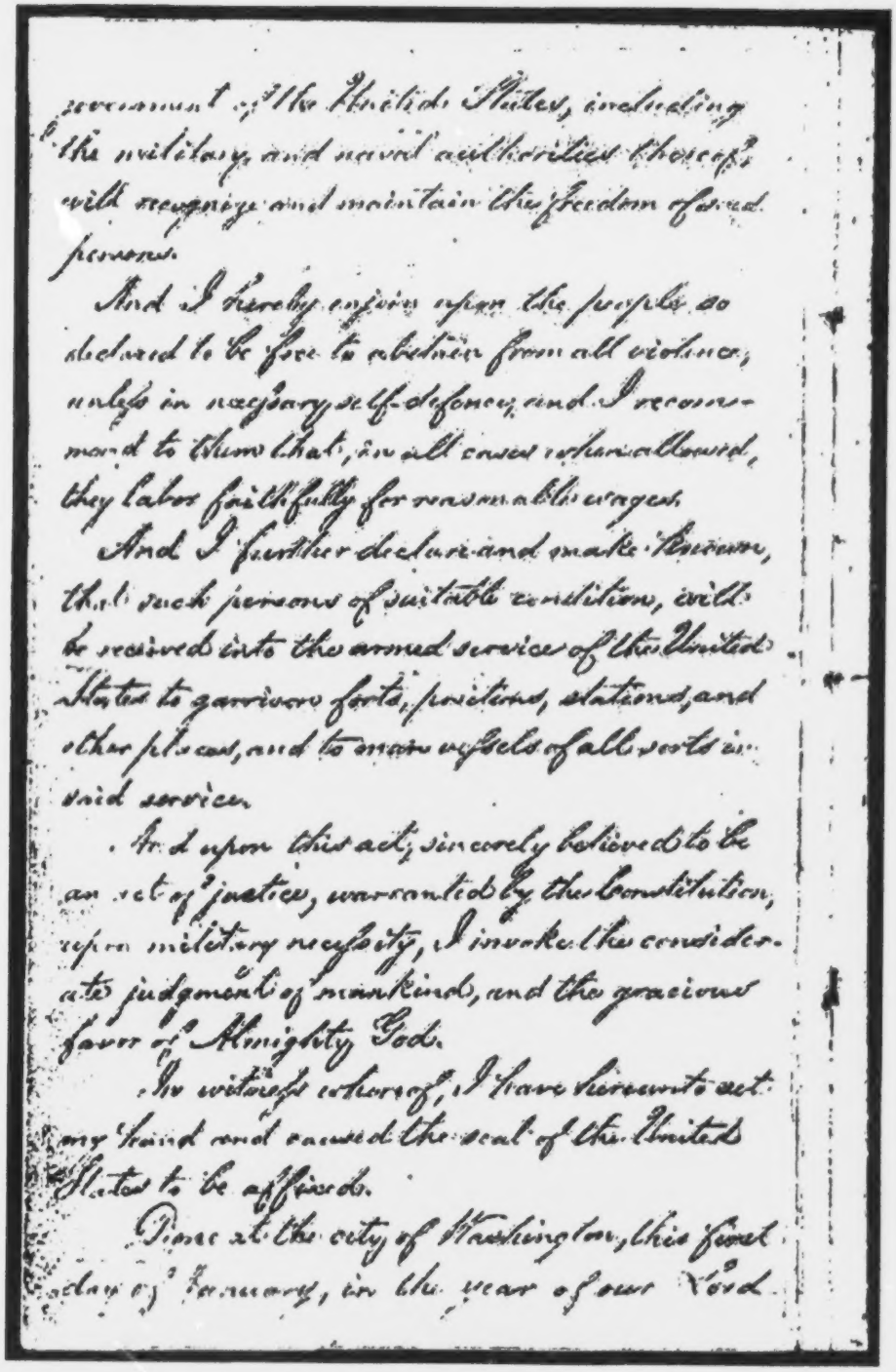

government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord

Emancipation Proclamation - Page 5

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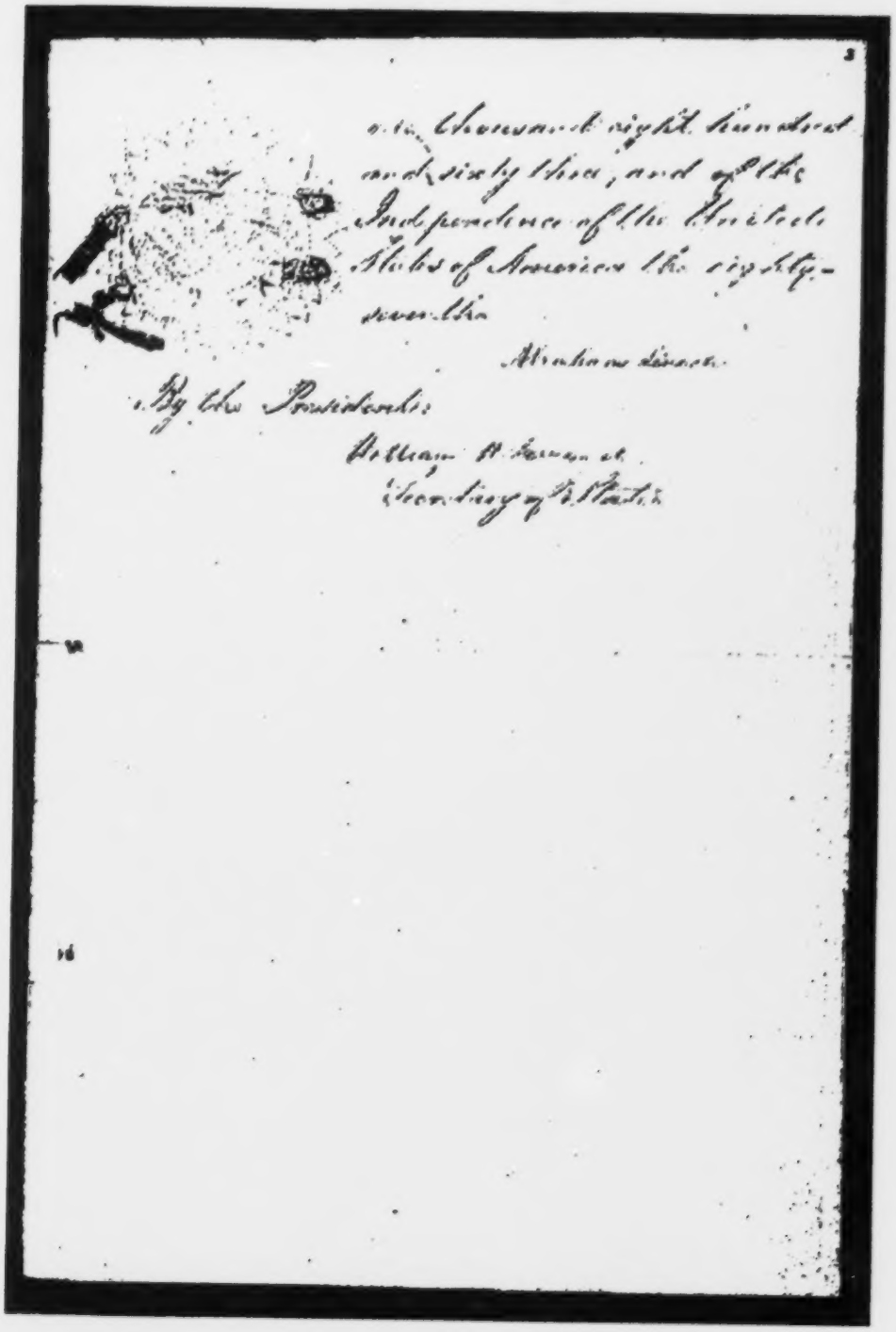

Emancipation Proclamation - Page 6

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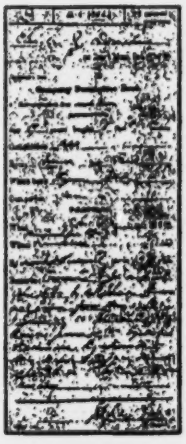
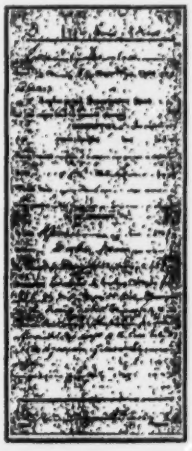
Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass's Sons



Company Descriptive Book for Charles Douglass, 54th Massachusetts

Frederick Douglass's sons, Charles and Lewis, lived with him in Old Anacostia in Washington, DC, but traveled to Massachusetts to join the 54th Infantry in April 1863. According to his Company Descriptive Book, which is part of his compiled service record, Charles transferred to the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry to become its 1st sergeant. Lewis was the sergeant major of the 54th and was wounded in the assault on Fort Wagner, as is noted on his Regimental Descriptive Book.



Regimental Descriptive Book for Lewis Douglass, 54th Massachusetts

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration.

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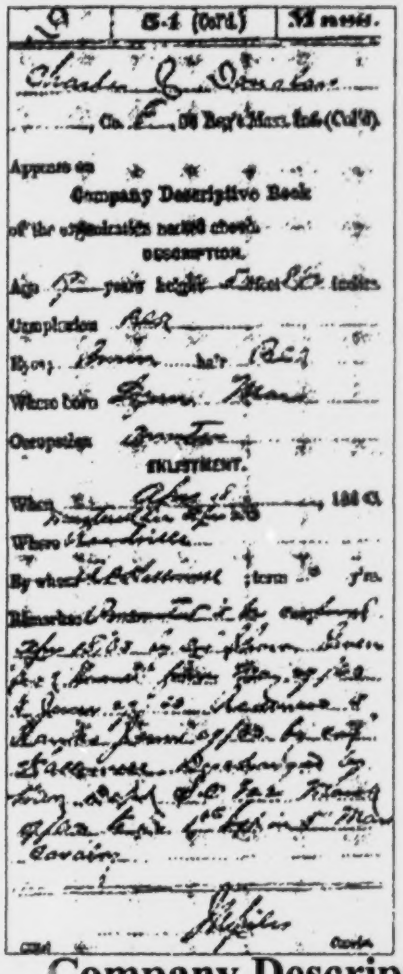

Company Descriptive Book

DESCRIPTION.

ENLISTMENT.

Company Descriptive Book for Charles Douglass (Son of Frederick Douglass), 54th Massachusetts

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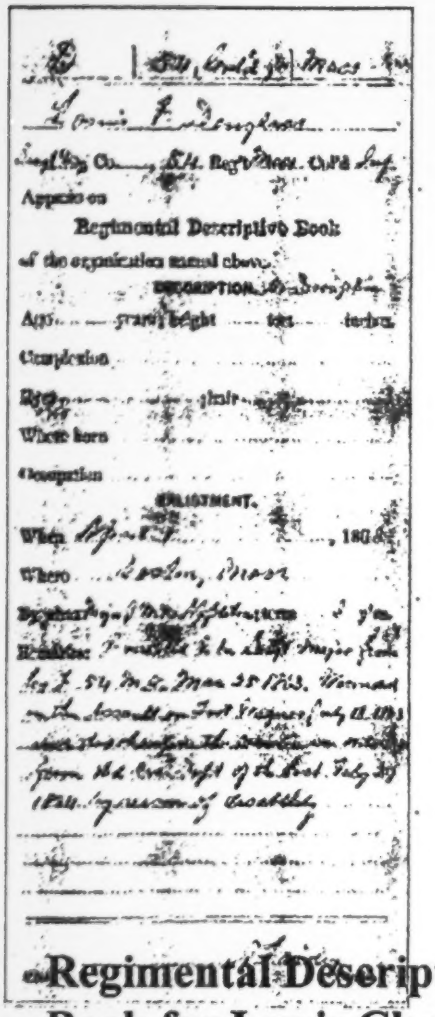

Lewis H. Douglass

Regimental Descriptive Book

DESCRIPTION

ENLISTMENT.

Regimental Descriptive Book for Lewis Charles Douglass (Son of Frederick Douglass), 54th Massachusetts

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Compiled Service Records

Compiled service records consist of both a jacket-envelope for each soldier, labeled with his name, rank, and unit, and several information cards. The compilation of service records of Union soldiers began in 1890 under the direction of Col. Fred C. Ainsworth, head of the Record and Pension Office of the Adjutant General's Office, Department of War. Information from muster rolls, regimental returns, descriptive books, and other records was copied verbatim onto cards. A separate card was prepared each time an individual name appeared on the document. Great care was taken through a separate operation of comparison, to ensure that the cards were accurate.

A typical jacket often contains card abstracts of entries found in original records relating to the soldier and original documents relating solely to that soldier. Examples of the latter include enlistment papers, substitute certificates, casualty sheets, death reports, prisoner-of-war memorandums, and correspondence. Unique to the records of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) are deeds of manumission, oaths of allegiance, proof of ownership, certificates of monetary award, and bills of sale. These items appear most frequently in units recruited in the border states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland. These states remained in the Union but were slave states. Jackets and cards include a section labeled "bookmark," which was reserved for cross-references to other records relating to the individual or his unit. The service records are arranged by arm of service, thereunder numerically by regiment or independent battalion or company, and thereunder alphabetically by name with the records of enlisted men. If an individual served in more than one unit, which was typical for USCT officers, there will be a separate service record for each unit in which he served.

Service records of all USCT units are being filmed as part of an ongoing project. Some of these records are available in the microfilm publications listed below.

- M1801 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry (Colored).
- M1817 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 1st through 5th United States Colored Cavalry, 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored), and the 6th United States Colored Cavalry.
- M1819 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 1st United States Colored Infantry, 1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored), Company A, 1st United States Colored Infantry (1 year).
- M1898 contains the compiled military service records of volunteer Union soldiers who served with the United States Colored Troops in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (Colored).

Microfilm is available for research at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, at 13 of our regional records services facilities, and through our Microfilm Rental Program (please note that only selected titles are available for rental). In addition, many large libraries and genealogical societies have purchased all or some of the microfilm sets listed above.

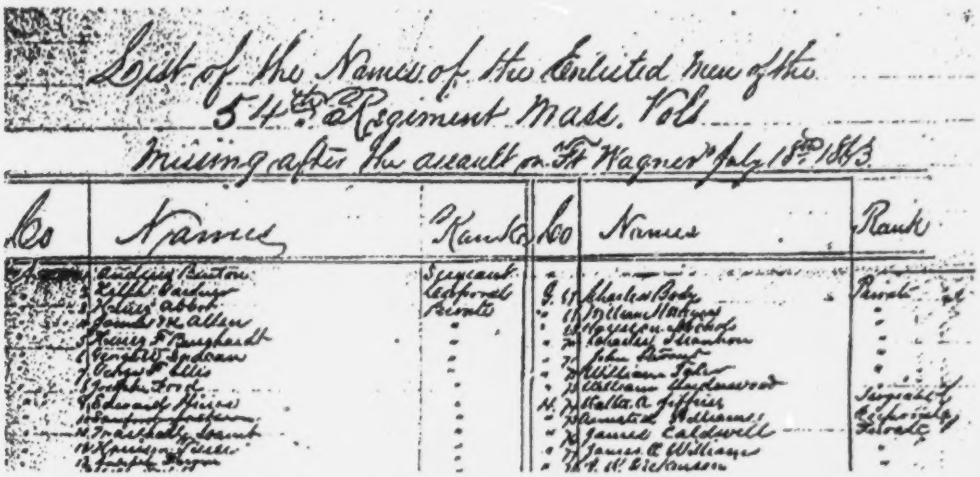
The National Archives Genealogy Page offers more information on records related to the Civil War.

Harriet Tubman

"The Fifty-fourth did well and nobly. . . . They moved up as gallantly as any troops could, and with their enthusiasm they deserved a better fate."
--Edward L. Pierce, correspondent for the New York Tribune, to Governor John A. Andrew, July 22, 1863

In the Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln announced that black men would be accepted into the U.S. Army and Navy. Of the estimated 2 million people who fought on the Union side, some 180,000 black soldiers and sailors fought for the Union and for freedom during the Civil War.

The 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment was one of the most celebrated regiments of black soldiers that fought in the Civil War. Known simply as "the 54th," this regiment became famous after the heroic, but ill-fated, assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. Leading the direct assault under heavy fire, the 54th suffered enormous casualties before being forced to withdraw. The courage and sacrifice of the 54th helped to dispel doubt within the Union Army about the fighting ability of black soldiers and earned this regiment undying battlefield glory. The 1989 film *Glory* tells the story of the 54th.



List of the Names of the Enlisted Men of the
54th Regiment Mass. Vols
Missing after the assault on Ft Wagner July 18th 1863.

Co	Names	Rank	Co	Names	Rank
	Audrey Burton	Sergeant			
	Killis Carter	Corporal			
	Volney Abbott	Private			
	James M. Allen				
	Henry F. Burghardt				
	Wright Andrew				
	Edward Ellis				
	Jonathan Frost				
	Edward Hicks				
	Wanton Jackson				
	Franklin Jones				
	Francis Wilson				
	Joseph Wilson				
			G	Absalom Body	Private
				William Hodges	
				Hopson Abbott	
				Charles Abraham	
				John Bump	
				William Tyler	
				William Underwood	
			H	Walter A. Jeffries	Sergeant
				Nathaniel Williams	Corporal
			K	James Caldwell	Private
				James A. Williams	
				H. W. Dickinson	

Casualty list of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment from the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, July 16-18, 1863

Shown here is one of the 54th's casualty lists with the names of 116 enlisted men who died at Fort Wagner. Of the 600 men that charged Fort Wagner, 272 were killed, wounded, or captured.
National Archives, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917

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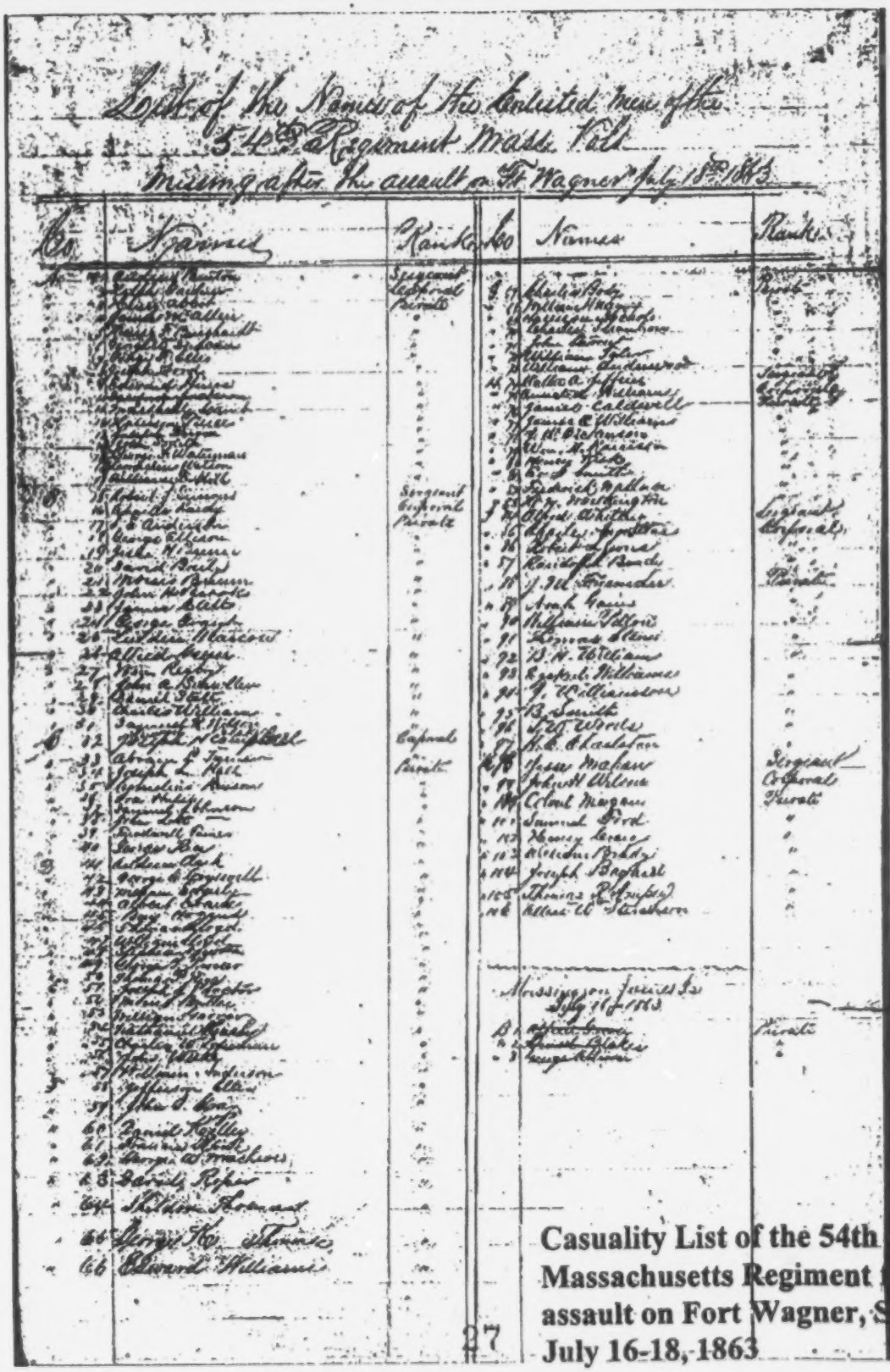

List of the Names of Non Enlisted men of the 54th Regiment Mass. Vol. Missing after the assault on Ft. Wagner July 18th 1863

Co	Names	Ranks
A	Charles Remton	Sergeant
	Geo. Parker	Corporal
	Peter Brown	Private
	Edward McAllen	
	James R. Campbell	
	Charles S. Lewis	
	Robert H. Ellis	
	Wm. H. Wentz	
	Edward Jones	
	Nathaniel Jackson	
	Nathaniel Lewis	
	Henry Lewis	
	Wm. H. Watkins	
	Alexander Wilson	
	Nathaniel R. Hill	
B	Robert J. Simmons	Sergeant
	Charles Lucky	Corporal
	J. C. Anderson	Private
	George Ellison	
	Jacob H. Jones	
	Daniel Paul	
	Moses Coleman	
	John H. Parker	
	James Cable	
	George Cooper	
	Lewis Mascow	
	Alfred Bayer	
	Wm. Ricks	
	John A. Bowman	
	Daniel Hall	
	Charles Williams	
	Samuel H. Wright	
C	Joseph H. Campbell	Corporal
	Abram F. Jones	Private
	Joseph L. Hall	
	Ephraim Anderson	
	Wm. Phillip Thomas	
	Wm. Lake	
	Nathaniel Jones	
	George Ray	
	William Clark	
	George A. Campbell	
	William Brady	
	Alfred Banks	
	Perry Reynolds	
	Peter Anderson	
	William H. Gil	
	Wm. Henry Thomas	
	Edgar J. Grear	
	Thomas H. Hill	
	Joseph F. Lapter	
	John H. Butler	
	William Foster	
	Nathaniel Brady	
	Charles H. Johnson	
	John Wells	
	Wm. Henry Jefferson	
	Jefferson Ellis	
	John S. Ross	
	Daniel Hartley	
	Reuben Brick	
	George A. Washington	
	Daniel Piper	
	Matthew Thomas	
	George H. Williams	
	Edward Williams	

Co	Names	Ranks
G	Charles Roby	Private
	William Hunt	
	Harrison Hedge	
	Charles Saunders	
	John Lewis	
	William Tyler	
	William Underwood	
H	Walter A. Jeffries	Sergeant
	Samuel Williams	Corporal
	James Caldwell	Private
	James R. Williams	
	J. H. Blackmore	
	Wm. H. Harrison	
	Henry Wells	
	Geo. S. Smith	
	Frederick Wallace	
I	H. T. Washington	
	Alfred Whitlow	Sergeant
	Charles Jefferson	Corporal
	Robert A. Jones	
	Randolph Randy	
	J. H. Fernandes	Private
	Frank Gaines	
	Wilkinson Jeffries	
	Thomas Stevens	
	W. H. Williams	
	Reynolds Williams	
	J. Williamson	
	J. Smith	
	J. D. Weeks	
	H. C. Charleston	
K	Isaac Mahan	Sergeant
	Abigail Wilson	Corporal
	Colonel Morgan	Private
	Samuel Ford	
	Henry Lewis	
	Alexander Parker	
	Joseph Bagnall	
	Thomas Pinkney	
	Allen C. Richardson	

Mississippi Juniata Pa
July 16th 1863

B	Alfred Brown	Private
	Samuel Blakes	
	Geo. Allen	

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Casuality List of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment from the assault on Fort Wagner, SC, July 16-18, 1863

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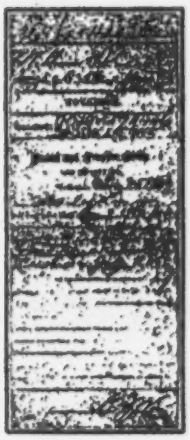
Sgt. Henry Stewart, Company E, 54th Massachusetts Infantry
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
(Not to be used without permission.)

Veterans of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry at the dedication of the memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the men of the 54th, May 31, 1897
Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
(Not to be used without permission.)

The memorial is located on the Boston Common. Col. Robert Gould Shaw, son of a white abolitionist, led the 54th and died during the assault on Fort Wagner. He was buried unceremoniously by Confederate troops in a common grave with the men he commanded.

Records of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment are among the military records held by the National Archives.

Medal of Honor Recipient



Notation Card for Sergeant William Carney

Sergeant William Carney of New Bedford, MA, became the first African American awarded the Medal of Honor for "most distinguished gallantry in action" during the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, on July 18, 1863. After being shot in the thigh, Carney crawled uphill on his knees, bearing the Union flag and urging his troops to follow.

Company Descriptive Book for Sergeant William Carney

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration.

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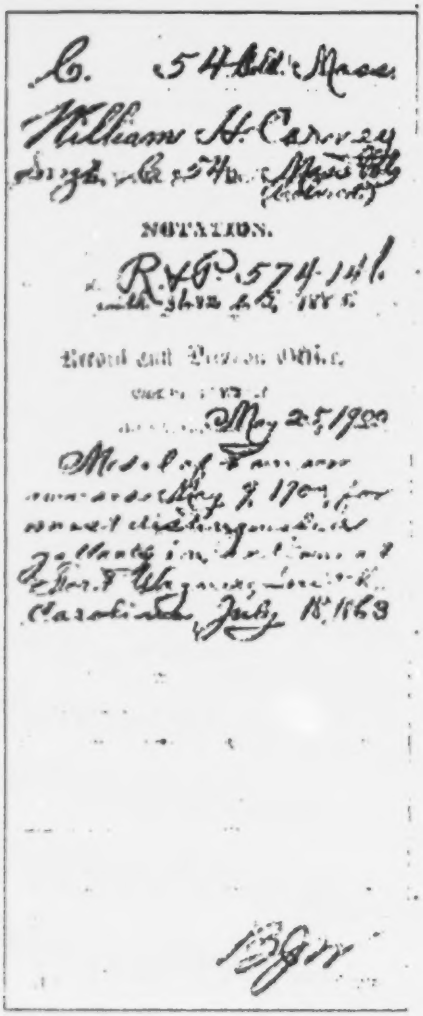
Co. 54th Mass.
William H. Carney
Sergt. Co. 54th Mass.
NOTATION.
R.4G.574.1st.
May 25 1900
Carolina July 18 1863

Notation Card for
Sergeant William Carney

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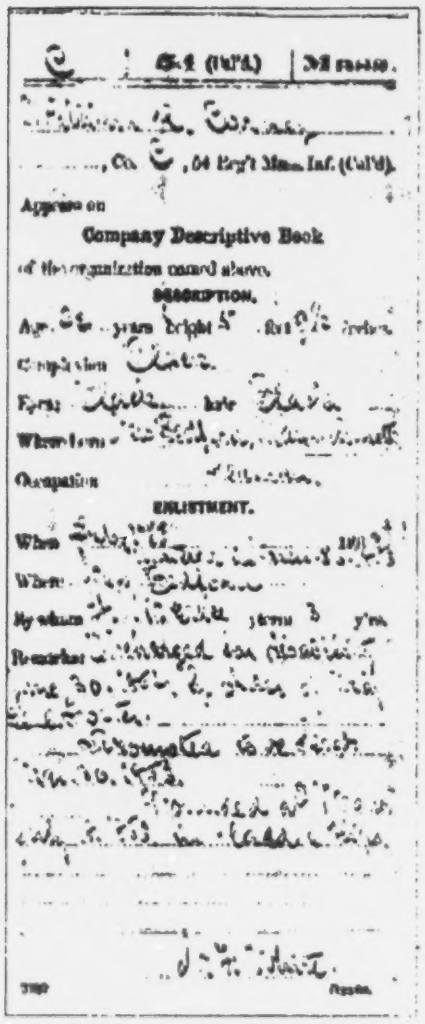


Company Descriptive Book

Sergeant ... Co. C, 54 Regt Mass. Inf. (Colrd).

Appears on

Company Descriptive Book

of the organization named above.

DESCRIPTION.

Age ... years; height ... ft ... in.

Complexion ...

Eyes ... Hair ...

Where born ...

Occupation ...

ENLISTMENT.

When ...

Where ...

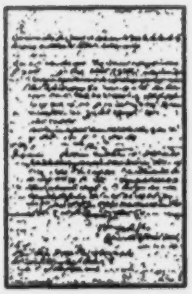
By whom ... term ... yrs.

Remarks ...

...

...

Equal Pay

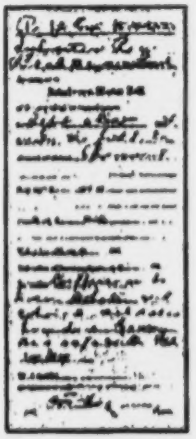


Charges and Specifications Referred Against Private Sylvester Ray, June 5, 1864

In early June 1864, Private Sylvester Ray of the 2d U.S. Colored Cavalry was recommended for trial because he refused to accept pay inferior to that of white soldiers.

First Lieutenant Edwin Hughes of the 2d U.S. Colored Cavalry, recorded Private Ray as stating, ". . . none of us will sign again for seven dollars a month. . . ."

Later that month, Congress granted equal pay to the U.S. Colored troops and made the action retroactive. This increase in pay is indicated on Private Ray's Detatchment Muster Roll.



Detatchment Muster Roll for Private Sylvester Ray

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration.

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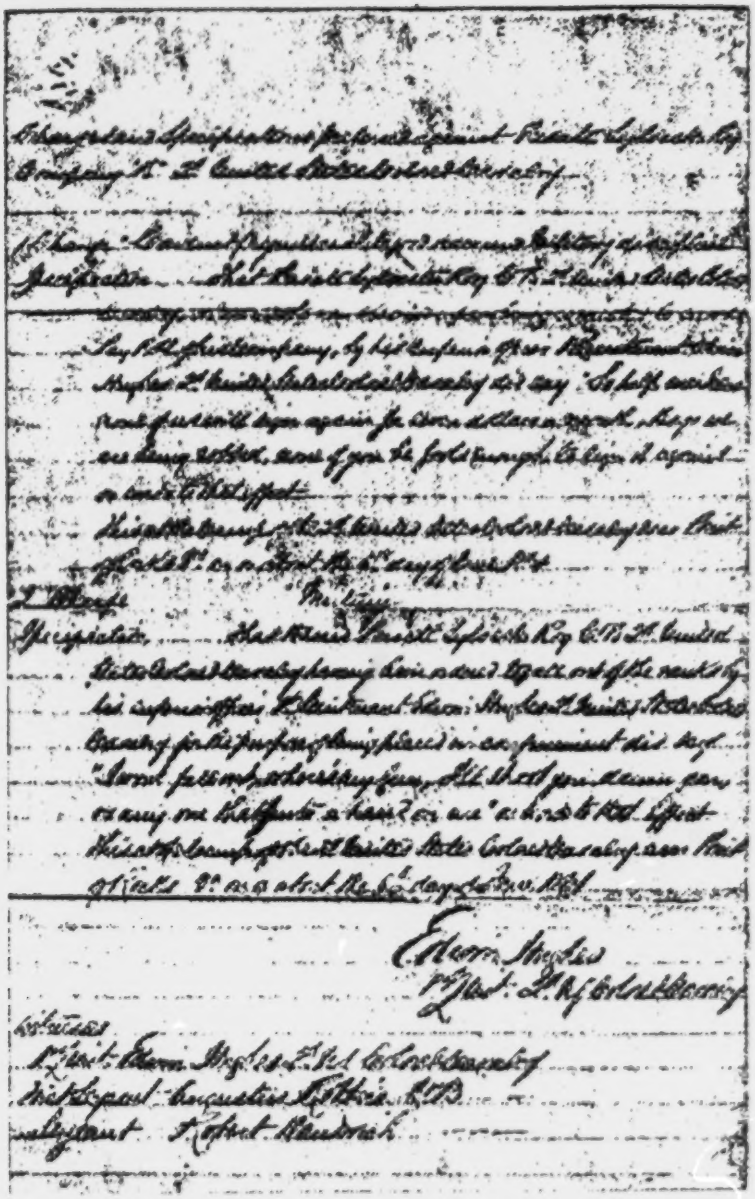

Charges and Specifications Referred Against Private Sylvester Ray, June 5, 1864

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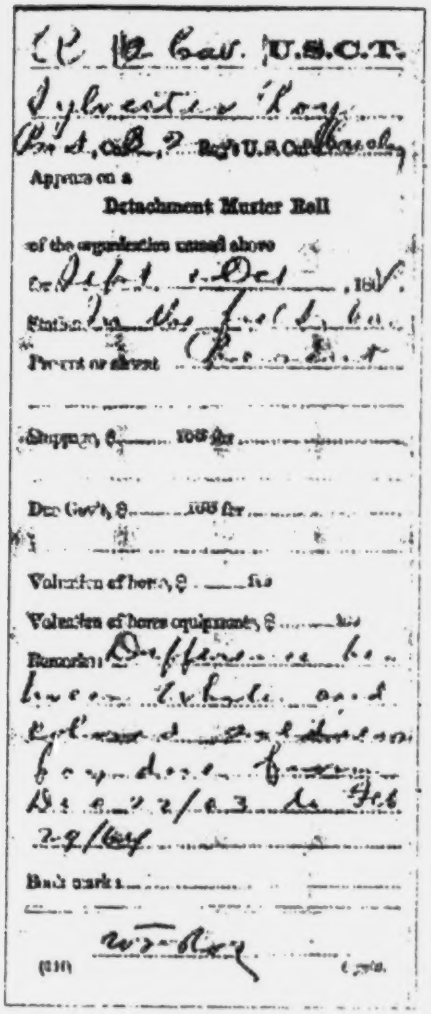

Co. B 2 Cav. U.S.C.T.

Sylvester Ray

Pvt. Co. B 2 Regt U.S. Colored Cavalry

Appears on a

Detachment Muster Roll

of the organization named above

for Sept. & Oct, 1865

Station In the field Va.

Present or absent Pr. on Det.

Stoppages $ ____ for ____

Due Gov't $ ____ for ____

Valuation of horse $ ____ for

Valuation of horse equipments $ ____ for

Remarks: Difference in horses, Saddles and Bridles and Saddlebags Corporal's Stripes Dis. 2/8/3 to Feb 29/65

Back marks: ____

(211) W. H. Ray Capt.

Detatchment Muster Roll for Private Sylvester Ray

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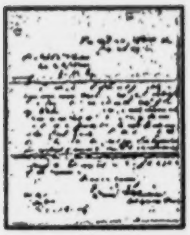
Treatment of POWs

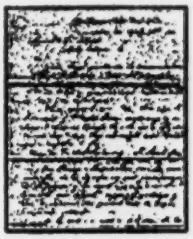


Letter from Colonel William P. Hardeman to Col. McCaleb July 30, 1864

On July 22, 1864, Private Wilson Wood of the 6th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery was captured by Confederate forces and held in a prison camp.

The letter from Col. William P. Hardeman alerting Union forces to Wood's capture reinforced Confederate policies toward African American prisoners.

In responding to this letter, Brig. Gen. J.M. Brayman explained, "When the United States made negroes soldiers it assured towards them the same obligations as were due to any others who might wear its uniform and bear its flag."



Letter from Brig. General Brayman to Colonel McCaleb July 31, 1864

View page 2 of the letter

Compiled Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94, National Archives and Records Administration.

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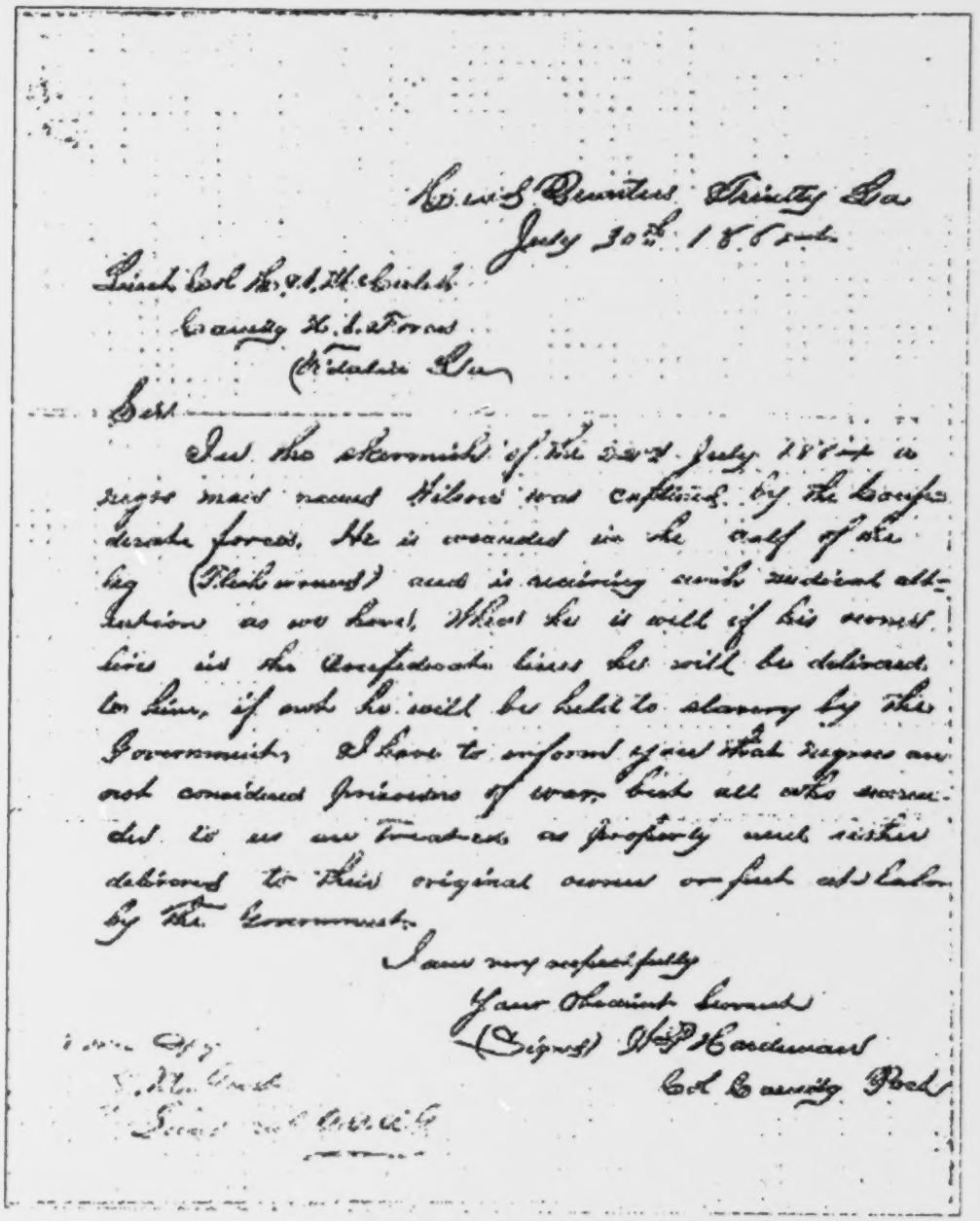

Lewis's Prentiss Trinity La
July 30th 1864

Lieut Col W. A. McCaleb
Comdg N. L. Forces
Milliken's Bend

Sir

Last the steamer of the 22d July 1864 a negro man named Wilson was captured by the Confederate forces. He is wounded in the calf of the leg (flesh wound) and is receiving such medical attention as we have. When he is well if his owners live in the Confederate lines he will be delivered to him, if such he will be held to slavery by the Government. I have to inform you that negroes are not considered prisoners of war, but all who come into us are treated as property and either delivered to their original owners or put at labor by the Government.

I am very respectfully
Your Obedient Servant
(Signed) Wm P Hardemann
Col Comdg Post

A true Copy
J. M. Cook
Lieut and Adjt

Letter from Colonel William P. Hardemann to Colonel McCaleb, July 30, 1864

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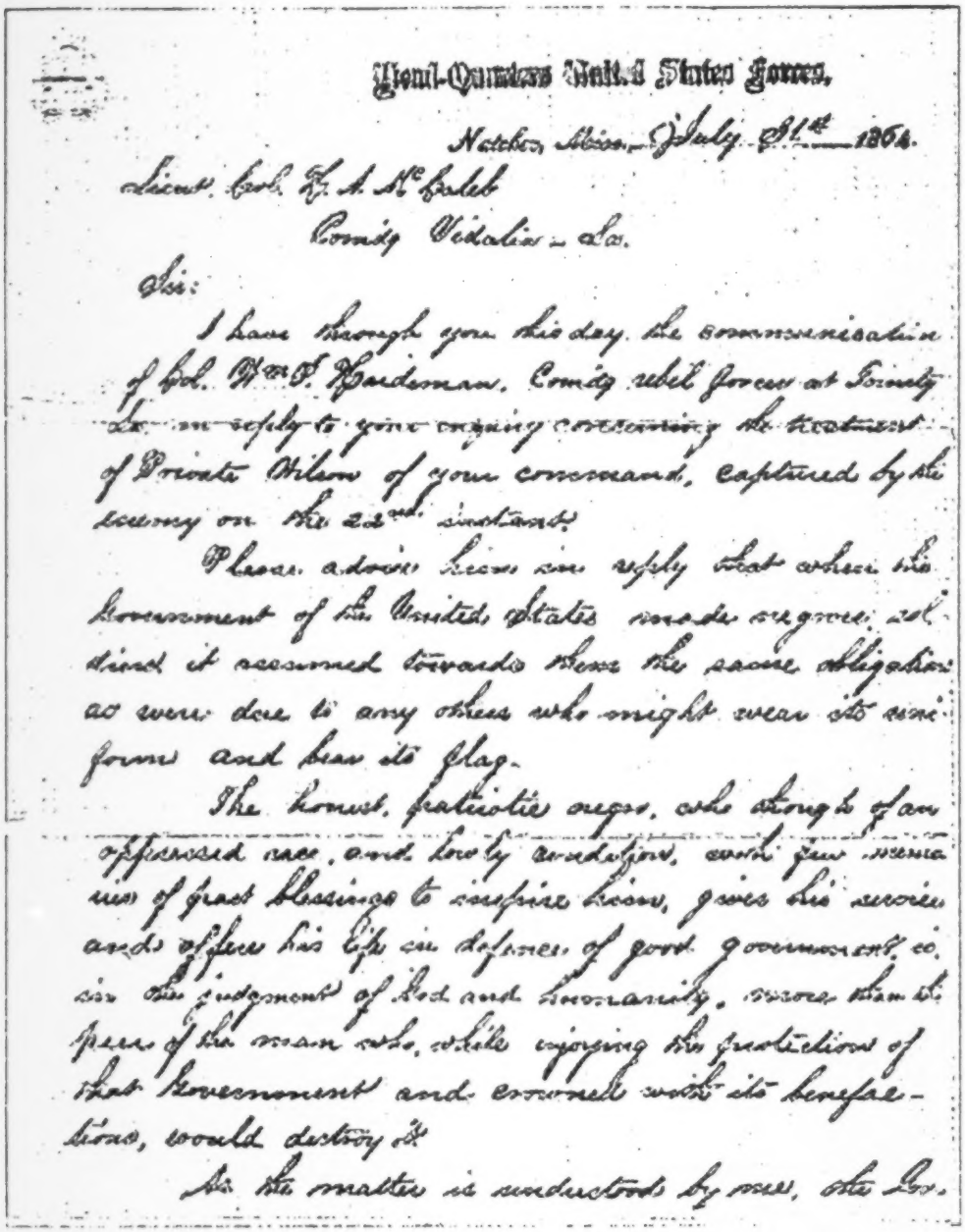

Head-Quarters United States Forces,

Natchez Miss. July 31st 1864.

Lieut. Col. F. A. McCaleb

Comdg Vidalia La.

Sir:

I have brought you this day the communication of Col. W.R.P. Brademan, Comdg rebel forces at Trinity La. in reply to your ongoing concerning the treatment of Private Wilson of your command, captured by the enemy on the 22nd instant.

Please advise him in reply that when the Government of the United States made engagements, it did and it assumed towards those the same obligations as were due to any others who might wear its uniforms and bear its flag.

The honest, patriotic negro, who thought of an oppressed race, and lowly condition, even few means of great blessings to inspire him, gives his services and offers his life in defence of good government, is, in the judgment of God and humanity, more than the peer of the man who, while enjoying the protections of that Government and crowned with its benefactions, would destroy it.

As the matter is understood by me, the Gov-

Letter from Brig. General Brayman to Colonel McCaleb, July 31, 1864

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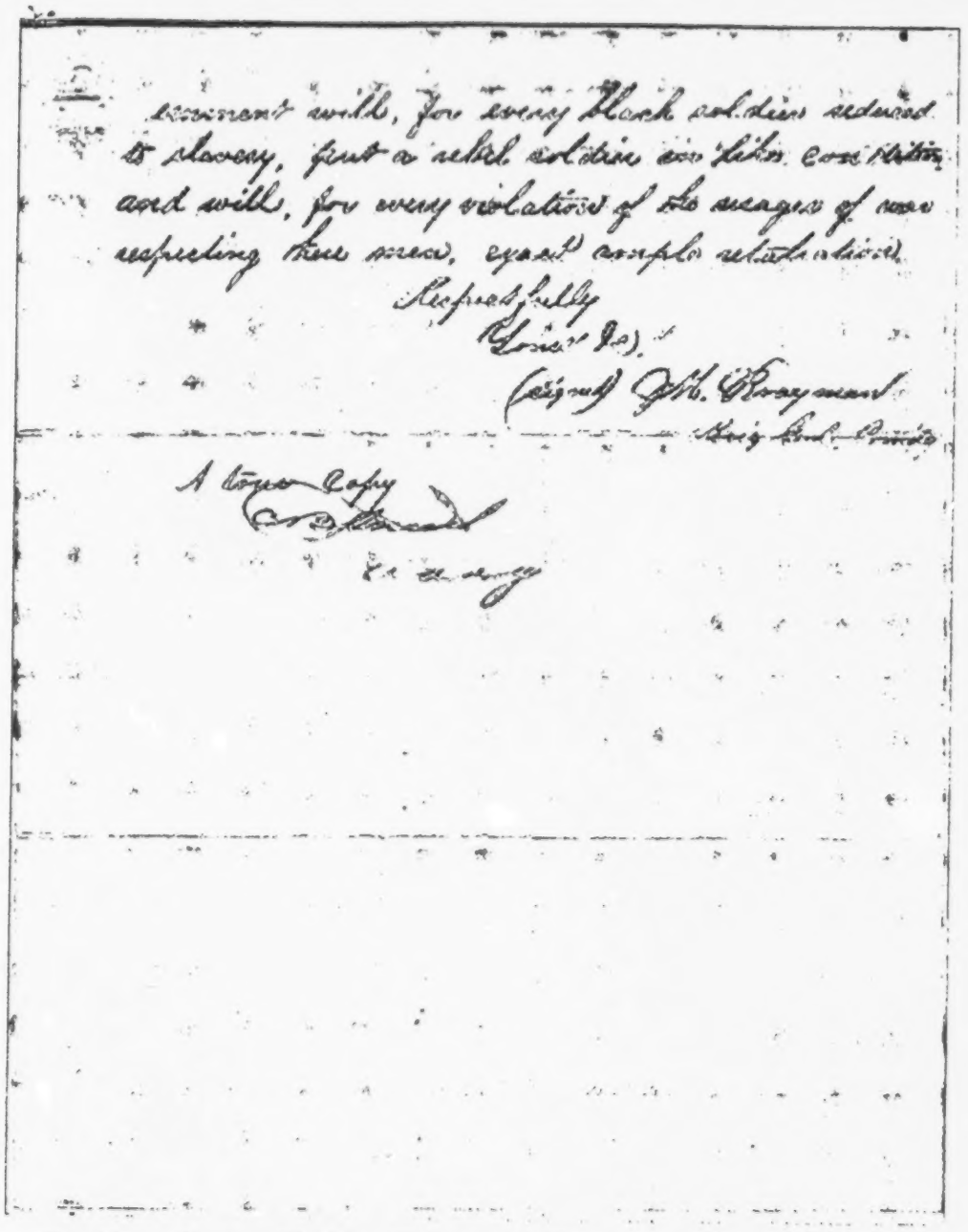

Letter from Brig. General Brayman to Colonel McCaleb, July 31, 1864, Page 2

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